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SUBJECT: ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS: THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN
TAJIKISTAN

REF: A) 08 DUSHANBE 1105; B) DUSHANBE 744

11. (U) Summary: Programs that teach English language and develop the skills of local English teachers are among the most popular and necessary public diplomacy offerings in Tajikistan. Learning English is viewed as the key to a better life for many young Tajiks, and U.S. programs fill the gap created by the government's lack of resources in this area. Post has shifted focus toward English programming but will need more resources to meet a growing need in a country where the majority of the population is younger than 20 years old. The rise in population together with the steady decline of educational infrastructure and English curricula mean an ever-shrinking pool of English speakers for State Department exchange programs. To counter that, post will seek an increase of \$100,000 for the English Access Micro-scholarship Program in FY10 and three additional English Language Fellows to prepare the next generation of English teachers in Tajikistan. English language programs and our broader Public Diplomacy efforts are critical in this former Soviet Muslim country which shares a border and language with Afghanistan. End summary.

12. (U) PAS currently supports its own development program for English teachers, known as the English Teaching Mentor program. Post oversees 11 English Access Microscholarship Program providers with a total annual budget of roughly \$102,000. Two English language fellows teach university students in the country's urban centers, Dushanbe and Khujand, and at least one English Language Specialist visits annually. In FY08, post supported a visit from a U.S. Fulbright Scholar from Russia to lead workshops for English teachers. Additionally, a local cultural center receives post funds for a weekly English coffee hour; Embassy officers visit between five and ten universities per month for English discussion; and the three American Corners host movie screenings, discussion clubs, and TOEFL prep courses.

13. (U) Ambassador Jacobson considers English programming integral to progress in all mission strategic goals, expansion of Tajik citizens' access to information, and their connection to potential trading partners. "English Language is critical to all of our programs, across the whole spectrum of mission goals. Improved English ability would broaden and improve the quality of the applicant pool for all our education and exchange programs, whether conducted by Public Diplomacy, USAID, or the military. English language is the key to accessing information on the internet and from credible news sources - without it, Tajik citizens receive their news and information mainly from Russia and Iran. Better language skills are necessary for Tajikistan to develop its economy, and establish effective trading relationships beyond the former Soviet Union. It's remarkable how English language programs also broaden cultural knowledge and critical thinking skills - both will be necessary if Tajikistan is to be stable and prosperous, a partner rather than a challenge to our efforts in one of the most complicated regions of the world."

14. (U) Deputy Chief of Mission Necia Quast noted the broader

context that English study brings. "We have seen that students learn not just the language itself, but also acquire new information, ideas and values along with the language. This, among other reasons, is why we now include an English language component in most of our Law Enforcement and Security training programs. English language programs support virtually every goal we have here."

¶15. (U) The English Access Microscholarship program has been an unqualified success. Post has increasingly focused on rural, underserved areas. Six of the 11 current programs are outside of Dushanbe. In 2008, students from the Rasht valley (the center of opposition to the central government, and one of the most isolated regions of the country), participated in the selection process for the Future Leaders Exchange Program for the first time. All are Access participants. One student became a semi-finalist and may be a finalist. Many students at Access programs in the Khatlon region have never received English instruction before. Most programs receive at least 200 applicants for 20 or fewer spaces. The Ministry of Education has allowed Access programs to recruit in schools, an unusual concession.

¶16. (U) While demand for English instruction is overwhelming, there are few qualified English teachers in Tajikistan. Given widespread corruption in schools and salaries of \$40 or less per month, proficient English speakers prefer to work for foreign Embassies or international organizations. The Tajik visa regime does not allow enterprising foreigners to teach English on a freelance basis.

¶17. (U) Post has sought to address this need with the English Teaching Mentor program, which provides 20 teachers from around Tajikistan with four training sessions during their year of participation. In 2008, post cooperated with INL to bring two English teachers from the University of Montana to Dushanbe for three weeks to teach a seminar for program participants. Post has requested an English Language Specialist to fill this role for 2009. Mentor program alumni train teachers in their home districts and are noticeably better teachers and speakers of English after their participation in the program.

¶18. (U) All 27 USG-sponsored programs at post are managed by a single LES cultural affairs assistant and an entry-level officer. Post has been assured of additional funding to support a new position for English Language Programs and would like to see that funding integrated into its base allocation.

¶19. (U) Concurrent with the steady rise in population, educational infrastructure is decaying and English teaching skills are declining along with the overall literacy rate. Post already is struggling each year to identify qualified English speaking candidates for many of our exchange programs. Simply put, without dramatic and sustained efforts to reverse these trends, our pool of applicants will dry up. To forestall that possibility, post requests an increase of \$100,000 for the English Access Microscholarship Program in FY2010. Post would benefit from up to three additional English Language Fellows, who would prepare the next generation of English teachers in Tajikistan.

JACOBSON